

September 29, 2008

# The Sommelier Says....

Hello and welcome to the weekly newsletter for <http://www.wine-sommelier.com/>

## **Upcoming Local Events:**

Pier Under the Stars –

Ventura's Premiere Food & Wine Tasting Benefit for the Historic Pier

Saturday, October 4, 2008

5 PM – 8 PM

On the Promenade adjacent to the Ventura Pier

The 15th Annual Pier under the Stars entertains the senses and delights the palate!

In honor of our 136-year old Pier, over 50 gracious restaurants, wineries, vinters and brewers invite you to sample their delicious creations. From the Chef's Signature Favorite to a rich Chocolate Mousse, a full-bodied Cab or a Vintner's Select - you'll find a little bit of everything at Pier under the Stars!

For the listening ear (and the inner groove), Luna Gitana!

And don't forget, the Silent Auction and Chance drawings are always a delight!

<http://venturaca.us/pier/node/1>

## **Leave California behind, try a nice Italian wine tonight!**

Looking for a beginner's guide to the world of Italian wines? Trying to distill down Italy's wine regions, varietals, producers and vintages into a beginner's guide is like trying to thread a rope through a needle, but here goes...

From Sangiovese to Trebbiano and the wide viticultural variations that lie in between, navigating the wine shop shelves to find an Italian wine that will complement Friday night lasagna can be a fun-filled experience - if you are armed with a little Italian wine knowledge.

While Italy has successfully planted the vast majority of the dominant international grape varietals, the country's domestic vines are what offer the true flavor characteristics that have made Italian wines world renown for ages. With literally hundreds of wines produced in Italy annually, it is no wonder that selecting Italian wines can be a bit intimidating. Deciphering Italian wine terms and names, interpreting Italian wine labels, learning Italian wine classification systems, understanding regional grape growing zones, and discerning grape varietals that do not always fall into the "familiar" category are all part of First things first, generally speaking Italian wines can be divided into two main categories: Table Wines and "Higher End" Italian Wines

Before, we go into the two categories, keep in mind that Italian wines are made for Italian food. The two go hand in hand, and like a good marriage the other typically enhances both. Table wines are generally less expensive red or white wines that are produced to be consumed in the easy-going atmosphere of an Italian-style family dinner. They are often sold in larger jug-like bottles and are a mainstay of an Italian dining table. Table wines are often fruit-forward wines that can lean a touch on the sweeter side, some are sparkling, and most are light medium bodied and are very compatible for first time wine drinkers. Lambrusco is likely the Table wine that comes to mind; for better or for worse. Lambrusco, a dry, red wine with a touch of 'frizzante,'(an Italian term for slightly sparkling) has had a reputation for focusing on quantity with a lackadaisical eye placed on quality. However, Lambrusco times have changed and many producers are upping their quality standards making this an ideal time to give it a try. Which to try? Check out Ca de Medici Terra Calda Vino Frizzante Rosso priced around \$10 a bottle. A super wine to pair with everything from spaghetti and meatballs to backyard BBQ fare. Another good Italian table wine is Bera Dolcetto d'Alba . For some, an authentic Chianti, encompasses the Italian Table wine genre. For others, they prefer to turn it up a notch, part with a few more bucks and experience a Chianti Classico.

High end Italian wines range in quality designations, from good to superior. With over 2000 native grape varieties covering varied terrain, growing in forgiving climates and all packed on one outstanding peninsula, you can imagine that the resulting wine combinations would be just as diverse as the sub-cultures that surround them.

Super-Tuscans, comprised of mostly Sangiovese, blended with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot or Syrah, typically quantify quality, and are thus on the upper end of the price spectrum (ranging from \$25 - \$100+). Due to unique blends and varied growing terroirs, Super-Tuscans cannot be easily pinned to one style or stereotype.

Good Barolo and Barbaresco wines, derived from the noble Nebbiolo grape are typically reserved for Sunday dinners or celebrations. These wines can range in price from \$35 - \$100+ depending on the vintage and producer.

#### Amarone Wines

The vast majority of Amarone wines come from the Valpolicella area, in Italy's northeast corner. They are typically considered one of Italy's big, bold red wines, Amarone has fruit-forward flavors of cherry, raisins, plums and spice. They are made from grapes that have been partially dried and historically have had higher alcohol contents (14-16% range). Top Amarone producers to consider are: Masi, Speri, and Allegrini.

#### Pinot Grigio

As for better quality Italian white wines, often Pinot Grigio comes to mind. The Stella Pinot Grigio 2003 (Umbria, Italy) retails for \$10 and is a fruit-filled delight with a refreshing finish.

Whether you are looking to expand your wine horizons or just hoping to grab a good Chianti with dinner, Italian wines are a cornerstone of today's wide world of wine. Cheaper than French wines, and in my opinion, just as wonderful.

### **Making plans for a Paso Robles wine weekend**

Saturday and Sunday, November 1 and 2, I will be heading up to the Paso Robles area for some wine tasting and you are all invited.

The current plans are to leave the Simi Valley area at 6 am on Saturday, stop for a nice breakfast in Buellton and then finish our drive up to Paso in time to begin wine tasting at about 11 am.

The Hotel is the Holiday Inn Express, 2455 Riverside Ave, Paso Robles, CA 93446. Rooms start at about \$150 a night; we are only staying one night.

If you want to go, you need to make your own hotel reservations, but please let me know if you want to join us for wine tasting, I will need to call ahead to the wineries, if we have a large group going. **I need RSVP's by October 27.**  
<http://www.pasowine.com/>

Cheers-

Tim

**If you would like to be removed from this list, please reply to me at [tim@wine-sommelier.com](mailto:tim@wine-sommelier.com) and request removal from this list.**